

## GUNDULIĆ AND HIS OSMAN

For so important a Dubrovnik writer relatively little is known of Gundulić's life. His family was a very old patrician stock which is mentioned in documents as early as the XIII century. The name Gondola would appear to stem from the Greek - a drinking vessel - or - a boat. Gjivo or Ivan lived from 1589 to 1638 when he died from a fever, probably pleurisy. Although he held various official posts, as became an aristocrat of the Republic, he never became Rector (knez) since he did not attain the age of fifty, requisite for such an appointment. He was a judge and twice Rector (knez) of Konavle.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there is some doubt both concerning his career and education. Some writers have affirmed that he was educated partly in Italy, as were so many of his class in Dubrovnik,<sup>2</sup> while Franjo Švelec points out that there is no certain proof that he ever left Dubrovnik soil.<sup>3</sup>

Little is known of his education although, even if he did not go to Italy, it was certainly in Italian and Latin. It is unlikely that he was educated by Jesuits, since the Republic did not allow the Jesuits to open a college there until 1604. One of his probable teachers was Camillo Camini who may have introduced him to the works of Torquato Tasso.<sup>4</sup>

In his thirtieth year Gundulić married Nikoleta Sjerković and had three sons and two daughters. Of his sons the eldest, Frano, entered the Austrian army and died as a Field-Marshal in 1700. His son Šiško (1633-1682) was also a writer and is considered the author of the play *Sunčanica* written in 1662.<sup>5</sup>

Gundulić's works have not all been preserved. In his introduction to his translation of the psalms of David (*Pjesni pokorni kralja Davida*), published in 1621, Gundulić mentions, as sins of his youth, ten plays, of which only *Arijadna*, a translation

<sup>1</sup> V. K. Zaitsev, *Mezhdru L'vom i Drakonom* [Between the Lion and the Dragon] (Minsk: Nauka i tehnika, 1969), p.50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>3</sup> Franjo Švelec, *Povijest hrvatske književnosti* [A History of Croatian Literature] (Zagreb: Liber-Mladost, 1974), p.167.

<sup>4</sup> Zaitsev, *Mezhdru L'vom i Drakonom*, p.49.

<sup>5</sup> Josip Hamm, 'Gundulićeva *Sunčanica*' [Gundulić's *Sunčanica*], *Gradja za povijest hrvatske književnosti*, 23 (1962), attempts, in my view unsuccessfully, to prove that the author of this play was Gundulić himself.

of *Arianna* by the Italian Ottavio Rinuccini, and *Prozerpina*, *Dijana* and *Armida* (a fragment of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*) remain. These works may largely be considered those of a beginner and of little intrinsic worth. *Pjesni pokorni* were published in Rome. In 1622 he published his original religious lyric, *Suze sina razmetnoga* (The Tears of the Prodigal Son) in Venice. This and *Arijadna* [Ancona 1632] were the last of his works to be published. His most important and original work, however, is the pastoral drama or tragi-comedy *Dubravka*, written in 1627 and performed in 1628. These, together with other shorter works, including his poem to Ferdinand II of Tuscany, comprise Gundulić's main writings other than *Osman*.

In his dedication to *Pjesni pokorni* Gundulić promised a translation of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* which was to be dedicated to the Polish King Zigmund III. This he never did, if we assume that an existing fragment of such a translation was not by Gundulić. Instead, the events of the battle of Chocim and the murder of the young Sultan Osman II (1621/22) led him to attempt an original epic which occupied him until his death in 1638.

## II

By the end of the sixteenth century the Turks had occupied almost all the Balkans except for the Dalmatian cities, as well as most of Hungary. They had indeed suffered some minor defeats, but in 1621 at the battle of Chocim the main Turkish army suffered, if not a defeat, then a major setback, which was followed by the murder of the young Sultan Osman II in May of the following year.

The situation between Poland and the Turkish empire was one of a disturbed frontier bounded by the vassal state of Moldavia. To the East the Turkish allies, the Tartars, constantly raided into Polish territory. On the Polish side were the irregular, orthodox Cossacks whose raids by land and water into Ottoman territory were a constant source of unrest between the two states. The Poles desired to gain control of Moldavia as a buffer state. In 1612 an attempt to support its ruler Jeremije Mohyla led to defeat. Mohyla had married his daughter Katarina to the Polish noble Samuilo Korecki (the Korevski of *Osman*) and in 1616 Korecki entered Moldavia and was defeated and captured at Jassy together with his wife Katarina. Katarina (the Krunoslava

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of Osman) shared his imprisonment. She was finally ransomed,<sup>1</sup> while Korecki, in 1618, made his escape in disguise, some sources suggesting that he passed through Dubrovnik on his way home.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile in 1617 the Sultan Ahmed died and a palace intrigue made his feeble-minded brother Mustafa Sultan instead of Ahmed's son Osman, a lad of fourteen years. Mustafa, however, was soon overthrown and imprisoned. Osman II, a boy of fiery nature, a fanatical Muslim and ambitious to emulate the deeds of his forefathers, was the last scion of the Ottoman house. The continuation of Cossack raids reaching almost to the gates of Constantinople naturally angered the young Sultan. In the meantime Mohyla had died and had been succeeded by Gašpar Gracijani who, fearing Turkish invasion, applied to Poland for aid, which he received in the persons of Zolkiewzki and Korecki. On the plain of Cedor the combined forces met the Turks, but Gracijani fled the field, leaving the Poles to extricate themselves, which they did by fighting a brilliant rear-guard action, retiring in a square of wagons for some six days and nights until finally broken. Korecki was taken prisoner for the second and final time. (Gundulić, perhaps purposely, mixes the occasions of Jassy and Cedor).

These were the events leading to the battle of Chocim. Osman now set out finally to subdue the Poles. Reports put his army at some 600,000 men, although most affirm that it did not exceed 300,000.<sup>3</sup> It included the Grand Vizier Hussein, ten pashas, the Crimean Tartars and the Tartars of Nogai. Poland, although representing Christendom, had largely to rely on her own people, mercenaries, and the Cossacks. Troubles with the Czechs and in Hungary kept Austria occupied. Pope Gregory XV promised aid which did not arrive. Perhaps the only enthusiastic ally of the Poles was the English James I, who saw them as the defenders of Christendom and promised 5,000 mercenaries. These too did not arrive, although James, through his ambassador to the Porte, Sir Thomas Roe, was to make every effort to secure peace for Poland

<sup>1</sup> Katarina was, perhaps, not so virtuous as Gundulić's Krunoslava. While in captivity she bore twins to a Tartar. See St. Musulin, 'Poljaci u Gundulićeve Osmanu', [Poles in Gundulić's *Osman*], *Književni rad*, 4 (1950), p.114.

<sup>2</sup> Osip Makowej, 'Beiträge zu den Quellen des Gundulićschen *Osman*', *Archiv für slavische Philologie*, 26, No.1 (1904).

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Roe, *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in His Embassy to the Porte from the Year 1621 to 1628 inclusive* (London: Samuel Richardson, 1740), p.11.

The Polish Diet placed its army of some 60,000 under the command of Carlo Chodkiewicz, the nominal commander-in-chief being the crown-prince Wladyslaw. Chodkiewicz's army reached the Dnester river in June 1621 in time to cross over and occupy the small fortress of Chocim where he was joined by some 35,000 Cossacks under Sajdaczni. On the left bank of the Dnester base camp was set up in Kameniec and a bridge was built across the river linking the two bases. Here Wladyslaw arrived with a number of mercenaries. He was already sick of a fever which was to keep him out of action during most of the battle. It is not, however, true to say that he took no part in the fighting at all and, in any case, as commander-in-chief, his presence would undoubtedly be felt. Chodkiewicz was to die during the battle of a similar fever.

Chocim was too small to accommodate an army, but it stood in an excellent position, flanked by woodland and the river. To supplement the position the Cossacks dug a perimeter of trenches which were to be of fateful significance. On September 2nd the Turkish forces arrived, comprising some 220,000 effectives and a large artillery of 100 guns. The following day a huge artillery barrage proved that this was one of the early lessons of the efficacy of trenches against artillery. On September 4th Osman launched a massive attack only to be beaten off again. For the next 34 days the Turks launched attacks on the Polish position only to be beaten back. The Poles suffered greatly from hunger and disease. As early as September 6th Chodkiewicz attempted to sue for peace. On September 15th Osman ordered a general assault, the failure of which resulted in the dismissal of the Grand Vizier Hussein and his replacement by Dilaver. (There is no proof that Dilaver saved Osman's life as Gundulić states in the poem). On September 22nd the Poles entered into peace talks, Chodkiewicz dying on September 24th. That year winter came early and snow was already falling. However, on the news of Chodkiewicz's death, Osman sent in a final attack on September 27th which resulted in 3,000 Turkish casualties. The Poles were at the end of their strength and finally on October 9th both armies prepared to retire, the soldiers of both sides fraternising and bartering whatever commodities they possessed.

All evidence suggests that both sides had done all they could. The Poles, apart from being hungry and diseased, were down to

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- 1 Musulin, *op.*
- 2 Roe, *op.cit.*, p
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.36.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.49.
- 5 N. Beldicean  
Reprints, 197
- 6 Roe, *op.cit.*, p

their last barrel of powder. The winter conditions wreaked havoc with the Turkish horses and most of its retreating army was on foot. Osman finally re-entered Constantinople on December 31st 1621. The battle had been 'close-run' and one cannot speak of a Polish victory. It was rather a Turkish set-back for, although it was the Poles who had asked for peace, the Turkish enterprise was clearly a failure. Had it succeeded it might well have changed the history of Europe. The Poles certainly did not pursue a defeated Turkish army, as Gundulić suggests, yet their halting Osman with a loss of some 100,000 dead must have been of incalculable importance for Europe and for Christendom.

While Musulin<sup>1</sup> considers that there is no evidence that the élite corps of the Janissaries panicked and helped to cause disorder in the Turkish ranks, as Gundulić makes Osman recall in Canto I, Thomas Roe in his ambassadorial report states: 'Polish sallies - on one occasion - caused great confusion among the Janissaries and almost caused panic in the entire army.'<sup>2</sup> Roe was where he would have direct information and his confidential reports to, among others, Mr Secretary Calvert, must carry some weight. Certainly Constantinople was in an atmosphere of disquiet. Roe reported: '... the present Grand Signor following dreams and visions and having phantastique designs, that they say here are ominous; and all sorts of people are discontent, even to a promesse to revolt; and the lyne of Ottoman very thinne, butt one madman and a child left.'<sup>3</sup> Dilaver, the new Grand Vizier, coming from Asia Minor, advised Osman to move his court to Egypt and to form a new army. In order to achieve this, peace with the Poles was seen as necessary. Roe approved of this plan.<sup>4</sup> The Janissaries had ceased to be the élite corps formed of Christian children who had been taken away from their parents and trained as soldiers by the Turkish authorities. Many of them were by now sons of high-ranking Turkish officials and they were jealous of their pay and privileges. Osman was certainly faced with an economic problem as regarded their pay. The decline of trade in the Levant, with the opening up of the New World, also had its effect. Turkish currency was debased.<sup>5</sup> Roe speaks of Osman, while he was in Constantinople, as being little better than the 'Janissaries' treasurer'.<sup>6</sup> Matters came to a head

<sup>1</sup> Musulin, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>2</sup> Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> N. Beldiceanu, *Le Monde ottomane des Balkans* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972), pp. 70-96.

<sup>6</sup> Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Gundulić would have had both Chocim and an annual tribute from the Turkish army to the Sultan, doubting that of Chocim could Dubrovnik make aware of the

- 1 Ibid., p.25.
- 2 Roe, op.cit., p.
- 3 Ibid., p.48.
- 4 Musulin, op. c

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

2 Roe, *op.cit.*, p.

3 Ibid., p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Musulin, *op. cit.*

and heady prince'.<sup>1</sup> Both reflect facts and opinions generally held at the time.

## III

Gundulić appears to have abandoned his stated intention of translating Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* and dedicating it to the Polish King Zygmund III because the events of 1621-22 presented him with a more interesting theme. Tasso's great epic dealt with the Christian reconquest of Jerusalem and was therefore aiming at an allegorical encouragement to Christendom to move against the threat of Islam at a time when it was at its greatest. Marko Marulić had written his *Judita* with a similar purpose and in 1593 Antun Sasin had written his *Razboji od Turaka*. The Ottoman empire had begun to show signs of weakening. Indeed there was a prophecy rife at the time that the Ottoman empire would fall one thousand years after Mahomet, that is to say in 1632. Osman's death was thus seen as a fateful sign confirming this. The general consideration that the event was of some importance is reflected, again, by Roe. Writing to Lord Carew he said: 'If it be lawful for mee to prophesy, I durst say that this mightie empire hath passed noone and is declyning apace, if not verie neare yts desolution, the lyne of Ottomans beeing almost extinct'.<sup>2</sup> After Osman's murder Roe reported: 'And I am persuaded, as many ages have not produced so strange an example of the uncertainty of human greatness, so in the disposition thereof, and in the ways of leading thereunto, there is seen evidently the wonderful providence of God in confounding the counsels of the wordly-wise'.<sup>3</sup>

Gundulić naturally knew nothing of Roe's opinions, but he would have had little difficulty in hearing direct information of both Chocim and the events in Constantinople. Dubrovnik paid an annual tribute to the Porte and with the advance of a huge Turkish army into Poland hastened to send its *orationes tributae* to the Sultan on the field of battle.<sup>4</sup> There is little reason for supposing that Gundulić's accurate knowledge of the topography of Chocim came from an eye-witness. Again, there were Dubrovnik merchants in Constantinople who would be as well informed of the general state of affairs and opinions as was Roe.

In any case, Chocim was a great event in Europe. Wladyslaw, although taking little active part in the fighting, was generally hailed as the victor. Musulin gives a list of Polish pamphlets concerning Chocim published between 1622 and 1633, although whether Gundulić could read Polish is not known. He shows some distinct knowledge of Polish history in *Osman*. In any case, Wladyslaw was a famous figure. In 1624 he made a pilgrimage to Rome and spent some months in Italy (November 1624 to March 1625) even staying at the house of the Gondola family in Ancona as is witnessed by a Latin inscription. It is most unlikely that Gundulić met him there or indeed had ever been to Ancona, but Wladyslaw's fame could not have failed to reach him. Also the fate of Korecki may well have been impressed upon Gundulić by direct knowledge. Makowej, although without real proof, considers that Korecki did indeed pass through Dubrovnik in 1618 on the occasion of his flight from his first imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> If this were true, then Gundulić could not have helped at least hearing of him.

That Gundulić had intended to translate Tasso's epic and dedicate it to Zygmund III is sufficient proof of his reverence for the Polish monarch and his views as a Christian and a Slav of the need to liberate Europe from Islam. Obviously the events of 1621 and 1622 were sufficient to alter his plans and the rest of his life was spent in writing his epic.

## IV

The idea behind Gundulić's writing of *Osman* was probably twofold. Firstly, as a Christian and one under some Jesuit influence, his interest in the defeat of Islam and of a crusade against it would be understandable. The Jesuits certainly saw Poland as the leader of Catholic Europe against the Porte. Moreover, the Slavs under Turkish rule, although many of them orthodox, were seen as possible allies. This is why, for example, Austria, later in the century, settled a large number of Serbian refugees on its territory. Poland was seen as the champion of Christianity by James I of England, just as by the Jesuits.

Secondly, Gundulić was above all a patriot, deeply devoted to his native city. In Canto III, 1.85 he wrote:

*Glasi se u njih sred naroda  
Od istoka do zapada*

<sup>1</sup> Makowej, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred A. Jen  
1900) p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> Juraj Križan  
Conversation



## CANTO I

Oh why have you praised yourself,  
Vain, human pride?  
The higher you spread your wings  
The greater your fall thereafter!

No firm thing under the sun  
Is eternal and without end,  
For in the heights the mountain peaks  
Are the first to be struck by lightning.

10 The world's constancy is fleeting for all  
Without aid from heaven above:  
Mighty and powerful empires  
Bear within them their own destruction.

15 The wheel of fate spins about  
And about ceaselessly:  
He who would be above, is cast down  
And he below is left on high.

20 Now a crown hangs above the sabre,  
Now the sabre falls upon the crown,  
Now the slave rises to an empire  
And the erstwhile emperor becomes a slave.

Fortune emerges from misfortune;  
A crown is gained by bloodshed  
And those whom many have feared  
Suffer fear of the many.

25 From treachery and ambushes  
An emperor's head is guarded,  
Yet in a moment things occur  
That confound all human experience.

30 Oh maidens, pure and gentle,  
Who atop the glorious and holy mountain  
By the sweet power of beloved song  
Speak to all poets,

35 Speak now to me  
How to the young emperor of the East  
His merciless knights gave  
Death in his Constantinople.

I know that, first, it is desirable,  
As you say, that I should sing  
How he was born the beloved and happy  
40 Firstborn of the emperor Ahmet;

And how on his father's death and  
By whose aid and by whose treachery  
Mustapha, his uncle, sat  
Upon the Ottoman throne;

45 And how the imperial seat  
Was taken from Mustapha and how, in glory,  
Upon this same throne  
The sultan Osman was placed as emperor;

And how, later, this young man,  
50 Desirous of gaining the glory of his elders,  
Rose against the Poles  
With a great host, yet with little honour.

But that by this my songs  
Be not of too great length  
55 Do you but announce of his death  
The evil causes, the sad events.

Oh Vladislav, glorious son  
Of the glorious Polish king,  
By which your manifold glory  
60 Fills the magnitude of the whole earth,

The majesty of your serene countenance  
Turn upon these verses,  
In which I seek to portray  
Your unconquerable deeds.

65 Oh noble crown-prince,  
On the death of the emperor Osman,  
Already with your almighty victory,  
Do all nations resound.

So from my trumpet may the world hear  
70 Of your ever greater glory;  
Perform ever greater acts  
And I shall not cease to sing them.

A painful memory had remained  
In Osman's heart  
75 That his countless army  
Had fallen by a Polish hand

- And that through all his great territory  
 Had thence arisen fame  
 That named the crown-prince Vladislav  
 80 The emperor's conqueror.
- Rode a traveller by land  
 Or sailed a sailor the sea,  
 Vladislav was hailed  
 In glory at the emperor's misfortune.
- 85 Be a merry company feasting  
 Or shepherds grazing their flocks,  
 All voices sang the glory  
 Of him who had curbed the Turkish might.
- 90 Already upon the wind's pinions  
 Rumour wafted over all the earth  
 Of how the young prince broke  
 The emperor's lances and shattered his sabres.
- 95 In the clear sky above the clouds  
 From East of him to West of him  
 The sun had written in golden beams  
 The name by which glory ruled,
- Telling how on the Dnester  
 He, the Grey Eagle,  
 Had smashed the Eastern Dragon  
 100 Pursuing him to the Danube.
- So at this the proud child  
 Grieved, pined and brooded,  
 Thinking all the world about him  
 Reproached him in praising another!
- 105 He cried: "Oh, crown-prince,  
 In no way do I envy you:  
 For so it was fated  
 That I should see you the victor.
- 110 Nor moreover does fate torment me,  
 Yours good, mine bad;  
 For once Fate has decided,  
 None shall ever escape its judgement.
- 115 But all the wounds of my heart,  
 All my torment and sadness  
 Are at my knights' disobedience  
 And the faithlessness of my warriors.

Oh deathless knights,  
Famed Turks of old,  
With whom my forefathers,  
120 Your emperors, conquered this whole world,

Where are your valorous acts,  
Where those glorious deeds  
Whose example is worthy  
Of the chivalrous orders?

125 You, passing your days in labour,  
Brave hearts and bold countenances  
Did you show, enduring  
The summer suns and winter frosts.

130 In adversities strong by reason  
Of your obedience of pure faith,  
You came fording the rivers,  
Running over the plains, leaping the mountains,

Thinking that to bear all hurts,  
Even to die, is better  
135 Than to transgress the emperor's commands  
By disobedience.

All your desires and your longings  
Seemed to be to ride  
Your beloved and beautiful war-horses  
140 And to shoot arrows from your bows.

Moreover each firm in purpose  
Chose for his delight  
A girded sabre, a lance in hand,  
A bow slung on his shoulders and a good horse.

145 On the march any kind of corn  
Without distinction was food for you,  
And a little cold water  
A noble and pleasant drink.

During the night halts  
150 The roofs shared by you and your horses  
Were hovels woven  
Of fine oak branches.

Both for the general and the knight,  
Be it by land or by sea,  
155 Both bed and table were  
The skins of mountain beasts.

- Moreover travelling north in mid-winter  
Along the Danube's frozen regions,  
Many a time for all of you a bed  
160 Was spread by snow, a stone your pillow.
- You were clothed in light clothing  
Hand-woven and most simple,  
And the heart and breast  
Were for the hero sufficient armour.
- 165 You despised 'all goods,  
All nobilities save those  
Gained by strength and the sword,  
Ever boldly making war.
- You considered that the worst  
170 Evil was to live without war  
And that to die was far better  
Than to spend one's days in idleness.
- You would say that  
Women spin at home in darkness  
175 While heroes overtake  
The enemy on the plains.
- You held it your honour,  
Your greatest pride and glory,  
For your emperor in battle  
180 To lose your fair heads.
- You would cry: 'Oh sudden death,  
We pay you no thought.  
That the empire may grow greater  
Let our lives be shortened!'
- 185 Ah, how blessed and honoured  
Do I account your times!  
It would be easy to gain the world's crown  
With such brave knights.
- 190 Alas, now all is different;  
The generals and the soldiers,  
All have turned about,  
All ranks are unfaithful!
- Each has to be forced to go to battle;  
Summer is too hot, winter too cold.  
195 Yet they don gold and silk -  
The forms of men but the natures of women!

And whilst they glitter in gold,  
In priceless accoutrements,  
They tempt the enemy  
200 Not to battle but to plunder.

Marching by land, sailing by sea,  
That they may travel in luxury they have  
Led before them chargers  
And behind them laden pack-horses.

205 Their tents are of silk,  
The chairs they sit on are gold,  
The birds in the sea, the fish in the mountains  
They seek as their food.

210 They hold long and sumptuous feasts  
On tables placed upon carpets,  
Drinking till wits and strength  
Perish from wine.

215 Luxurious are their feather mattresses  
In which they sink all night in lechery,  
In perfume and decoration,  
Against both nature and the faith.

220 Each, surrounded on all sides  
By squires and attendants,  
Rides, decked in gold, a black horse  
And, head high, looks proudly

And swaggers and preens himself  
With the vainglory of a hero,  
All in appearance and words,  
But in their actions nothing!

225 Oh how often, full of disquiet,  
Have I seen one of the Christians  
Driving and dispersing flocks of them  
Like sheep from all sides!

230 I would shout, leap upon my horse,  
General and soldier at the same time,  
Beside myself with dismay  
At this shameful disorder.

235 Nor did I hesitate to avenge  
Such offensive insults,  
Making some return to battle, threatening others,  
Reckless of any losses.

- 240 'O fools and evil ones,' I cried,  
 'What are you afraid of?  
 Oh do you not, like the Christians,  
 Possess two hands each?
- Or are they more than men?  
 Or have you no heart in you?  
 What terrifies you? What troubles you?  
 Where is our old Turkish bravery?
- 245 It is better for you to find death  
 And fall in battle with your lance  
 Than to perish like this,  
 Nameless and without honour.'
- 250 But in vain one's strength is wasted.  
 The tongue shouts, the arm strikes,  
 For these men's fear is joined  
 With the disobedience of the Janissaries.
- 255 The Spahoglans,<sup>1</sup> who amid the battle  
 Still fought bravely,  
 Began, like these, to give way  
 And they too retreated headlong.
- 260 This is the reason Polish swords<sup>2</sup>  
 Cut down my warriors  
 And beside the Dnester there flowed  
 A second river of blood:
- And so everywhere that river  
 Was filled and dammed  
 With bodies of the dead  
 Slain by Polish might.
- 265 But henceforth it is my will  
 That my hand shall revolve the earth  
 And alone have command  
 Over life and death.

<sup>1</sup> *Spahoglan*: the son of a spahi, the feudal landowner and cavalry soldier of the empire.

<sup>2</sup> *Mač* is used throughout as sword, compared with *sablja* as scimitar. Again cf. Njegoš, *Šćepan mali*, ll. 38-39, 'Što uteče ispod sablje tvoje/ Neće uteć ispod mača moga.'

270 So we emperors are the cause  
Of all evils, our own included,  
When we honour not heroes  
But fornicators from the Saraj.

275 And we who desire that those who spend  
Their days serving in lechery  
Should engage the foe in battle  
And rule and conquer.

280 We who, to increase our wealth,  
Care for nothing else,  
And what used to be the hero's payment  
Is now the emperor's trade.

But the emperor's trade is now carried on  
By regent-merchants;  
They impress a crowd of shepherds into the army  
And pay them as if they were soldiers.

285 With these shepherds taken from their flocks  
And under such generals  
How can you hope they'll ever dare  
Fight against heroes?

290 No, no! you warrior peoples of the East,  
I have set greater deeds on foot  
And in this sabre I hold  
The fate of the world and your fortune!

295 The emperor Alexander  
Almighty in ancient times  
Fighting, a young man as I am,  
Gained the empire of the whole world.

300 And the brave emperor Suleiman,  
The glorious ancestor of my grandfather,  
Put on the sword when he was my age  
And took command of armies.

Long ago I have taken these two emperors  
As examples for my ambitions.  
I shall follow their glorious deeds  
Until I conquer all this world.

305 Bold are these preparations.  
I know what I shall do and what is required."  
He ceased and, full of ambition,  
Began to plan mighty matters.



- 310 He turned his thoughts to taking  
All the imperial treasure to the East  
And to compose letters in which could be read  
The names of all the knights he paid
- And to reck not here  
Of pouring money on every side,  
315 Which would enable him to assemble  
The greatest gathering of heroes.
- And to the Janissaries, moreover,  
He would add anew a large number  
Of knights from the East  
320 At his own choosing.
- And the companies of Spahoglans, too,  
He would make them twice as large,  
Joining and uniting them  
With his newly selected levies.
- 325 So would they be tamed by this bridle  
And, henceforth obedient,  
Without sparing their lives  
Fly where the emperor commanded.
- Also he determined in his mind  
330 To swear an oath  
That he who showed himself the greater hero  
Should gain the greater honour in his sight,
- Desiring that in his realm  
Only those should rise  
335 Who gained honour in battle  
Fighting the foe.
- And that neither money, debauchery nor women,  
But only naked courage  
Should be the path to grace and favour  
340 At his imperial table.
- By means of such gratitude  
He hoped to emerge all-powerful  
And, in a short time, extend himself  
From East to West.
- 345 This his firm decision  
He first divulged  
Under oath and in secrecy  
To Dilaver, the head of his pashas,

350 To him who with ten thousand boyars  
On the East side of the army  
The previous Autumn had rescued  
The young emperor from the Poles.

For this the emperor dismissed  
The then Grand Vizier Hussein  
355 And raised this man gloriously  
To rule the empire in his place.

But what he did not conceal from him  
He also announced to his q'adi  
And to the Hadum of the harem,<sup>3</sup>  
360 The dark keeper of the white nymphs,

And ordered that each keep secret  
The idea of this plan,  
Deeming it useful advice  
To mask it as an act of piety.

365 Therefore he allowed rumours to be spread  
And gave all to know  
That he intended to go to Mecca  
To pay homage at Mahomet's grave:

And thence, he said, he would turn  
370 Through the coastal provinces  
And put to death  
The Emir of Sidon with his rebels.

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<sup>3</sup> *Hadum*: the chief eunuch in charge of the harem